

# A French Chateau in the Badlands

By KATE H. BROWER.

TO most of us the word "chateau" implies battlements and towers and the wooded hills of France—visions hardly compatible with things American. But our own country can boast a "regular" chateau. And, stranger still, this historic structure is to be found not in the storied environment of old New England but "out where the West begins."

In the heart of the North Dakota Badlands the little town of Medora nestles appealingly against a background of variegated, fantastically formed buttes. A transcontinental railroad passes through it; a national motor highway, winding along the precarious trails of the Badlands, pauses for a moment on "the" main street—the street that was once a busy thoroughfare.

For some miles both to the east and to the west of the hamlet the traveler notices occasional signposts calling his attention to the fact that a marvelous petrified forest is to be found north of Medora on the banks of the Little Missouri. On the outskirts of town is posted the additional information: "Theodore Roosevelt Once Ranches in This Section." But only the most observing will take note of a modest placard, placed at a slight divergence in the trail: "Chateau de Mores—a Lodging for the Night."

Medora's historical background is as picturesque as its physical setting. And its present state of innocuous desuetude is no more pathetic than is the story of the man who built the town, gave to it the name of his wife and spent more than a million dollars in a vain effort to establish a colossal industry in the heart of the old "cattle country." Historians have dwelt at length upon Theodore Roosevelt's career as a cowboy, near Medora. Of the other man, Antoine de Vallombrosa, Marquis de Mores, they have spoken only incidentally. For man is—and ever shall be—measured by his accomplishments. But though the brilliant schemes of the Marquis failed utterly, the landmarks he left behind cannot help but fascinate those of us who achieve a thrill, vicariously, by delving into the days that are dead.

The Marquis de Mores came to the Badlands in the spring of 1883. A relative had hunted there a short time before, and tales of the great cattle country intrigued the Marquis's adventurous spirit. A son of a duke, a member of the Orleans family, a captain in the French army, he had been married a year before to Medora von Hoffman, daughter of L. von Hoffman (sometimes called Baron), one of New York's wealthiest bankers.

The Marquis arrived in the Badlands with a ready-made plan to establish there a huge packing plant that would one day outrival those in Omaha and Chicago, and, backed by his father-in-law's millions and his own resources, he was prepared to accomplish his purpose.

At that time there was a small settle-

ment called Little Missouri on the west bank of the river of that name. The inhabitants—a heterogeneous collection of cowboys, trappers and adventurers—looked askance at the prodigious scheme unfolded by the voluble Frenchman. So the Marquis immediately set about building a town of his own on the east bank of the river.

## The Preparations Are Elaborate.

With unlimited capital at his disposal the Marquis de Mores "built his city" without thought of expense. He erected a trading store, a brick hotel, a church, and a brick residence for his father-in-law

twenty-two servants and a fair proportion of the good things of life, which, to one of cultured tastes, would be indispensable even on the frontier. The chateau was furnished throughout; rich rugs, china, plate, pictures, heavily canopied beds, paintings and books, books, books. The De Mores establishment would have held its own in a place of old traditions. Madame de Mores was something of an artist, having in fact studied in Paris, and she soon added to the decorations of her new home a number of worthy sketches and water colors of the Badlands.

Under the brow of the hill on the dense

ing buffalo. That he found the country to his liking and for four years linked his fate with the rough frontier is a matter of history—and it is "another story" as well.

The Marquis purchased some 15,000 acres of land and many, many cattle, which he proposed to fatten on the "short grass" that is the Badland's only native pasturage.

## A Simple Little Story.

The story is told—scoffed at by some, credited by others—that certain unscrupulous cattlemen who had agreed to deliver a few thousand dollars' worth of cattle to



Medora, town founded in North Dakota by De Mores, now shrunk to 200 inhabitants.

when that gentleman should desire to sojourn in the Badlands. Across the river on a grassy slope above an especially heavily wooded bottom land he placed the chateau that still stands—a reminder of dead hopes and days that are gone.

The chateau, patterned after Washington's home on the Potomac, was to be a summer home for the Marquis and the Madame. A "country seat" it was, in effect, from whose vantage point the Marquis might watch the rise of her husband's vast undertakings; where she might rest from the social life of New York and Paris, and which should serve as a base of supplies for hunting trips on those rare occasions when the Marquis could desist from the great task remaining before him. The Madame was known as an excellent horsewoman and her skill with arms was said to be no less than that of her dauntless husband.

To this thirty room castle, then, shortly after its completion, came the beautiful Madame de Mores. With her arrived some

flat of the Little Missouri the Marquis built his stables and his coachman's house. Whenever time afforded, the Madame and the Marquis ventured back into the weird reaches of the Badlands in search of game. The long trips were made in a quaint coach built especially for that purpose—a strongly constructed, canvas covered vehicle with all sorts of cubbyholes and nooks to hold the spoils of the hunt.

It was no light adventure, this seeking the wilds of Dakota back in those days. Scattered bands of Indians still wandered through the country. Seven years before, on a spot a few miles south of the chateau site, the ill-fated Custer had bivouacked his forces for a day or two on that famous march to the Little Big Horn.

Six months after the Marquis arrived on the banks of the "Little Muddy" there came out of the East another young man. Theodore Roosevelt, bag and baggage, landed in Medora in the fall of '83, bent upon shooting a few of the fast disappear-

the Marquis, arranged to show him the animals at a place several miles out of Medora. The Frenchman arrived at the appointed spot. Soon came the cowmen with three or four hundred head of stock. The Marquis bought the whole herd and promised to wait a few hours until another bunch could be rounded up for his inspection. Whereupon the parties of the second part drove the same cattle around a butte and sold them over again to the unsuspecting Frenchman!

The story has probably lost nothing in the years that have passed, but it is typical of the nature of the Marquis's commercial ventures. He evolved numberless projects that would turn Medora into a great industrial center. He built his slaughter house and, finding that its operation on a comparatively small scale was unprofitable, early in 1885 he erected a huge abattoir large enough to accommodate the daily slaughter of 100 cattle. He built storage plants at points in the East and arranged for the selling of his beef in both New York and Chicago.

## No Use—Everything Fails.

But the Three Blind Sisters seemed bent upon perverting his plans. Nobody would buy his dressed meat. Corned beef the public apparently preferred. He could not persuade the railroads to grant him rebates sufficient to insure his meeting competition. He was not to be daunted. Sheep became a side line with the Marquis. The sheep died like flies. He bought droves of horses, paid too much for them and lost heavily.

He conceived the idea of establishing a stage line between Medora and Deadwood, South Dakota, just then coming into the public eye because of the discovery of gold in the Black Hills. The Marquis spent freely of the De Mores and the Von Hoffman funds in starting this line. Then, just as it was completed, the Government mail contract was given to a line out of Pierre, South Dakota. This contract was absolutely essential as a means of handling the overhead expense. The Marquis's stages operated fitfully for two years, and then the project died without a struggle—a dead loss to its originator.

But the optimism of the Frenchman was exceeded only by his courage. He conceived ideas without number: he would raise cabbages; he would manufacture pot-



Marquis de Mores's "chateau" in the Badlands, North Dakota, now used as a "lodging for the night."

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